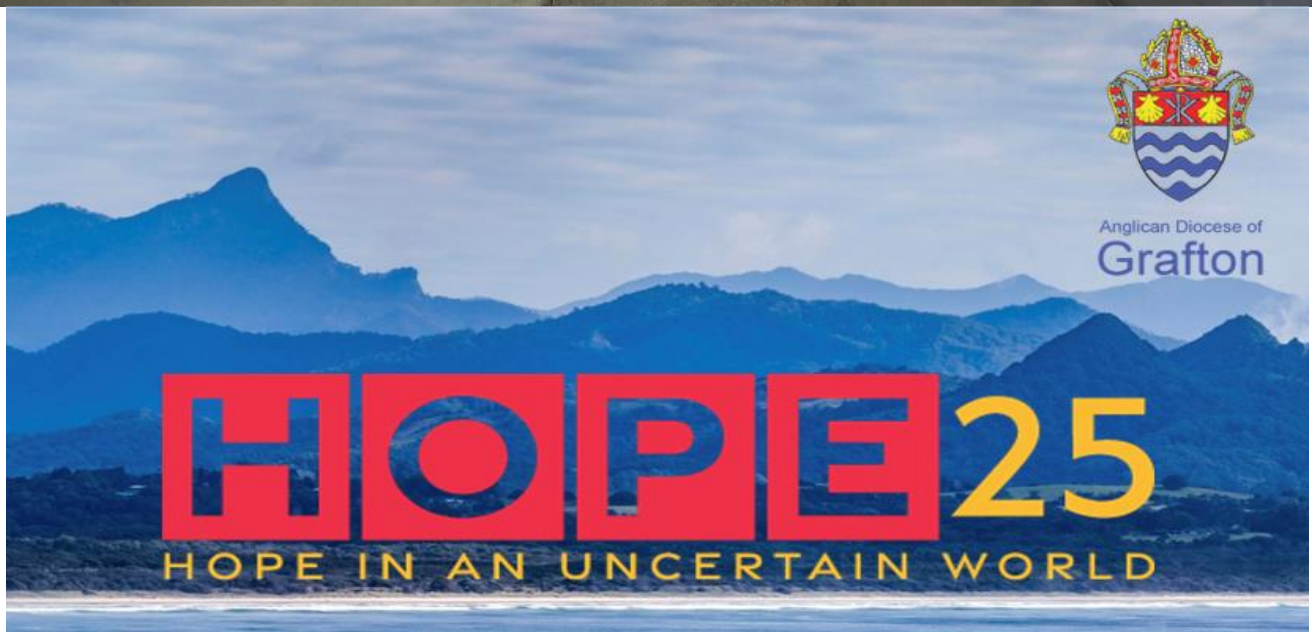


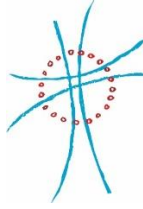
President's Address

The Synod of the Diocese of Grafton

27-29 June 2025

Dr Murray Harvey
Bishop of Grafton





I acknowledge the Bundjalung, Arakwal, Yaegl, Githabul, Gumbayngirr, Dunghutti and Birpai peoples, the traditional custodians of the lands on which the Diocese of Grafton is based.

I pay tribute and respect to the elders of these nations and peoples, both past, present and emerging, acknowledge their continuing connection to the land and waters, and thank them for their protection of the mountains, hinterland, waters and coastline since time immemorial.



The artwork "Eternal Goodness" by Wiradjuri artist Narelle Urquhart was created for the Anglican Diocese of Grafton. It depicts God's goodness through his Son Jesus for the people and land of the Northern Rivers.

*Front Cover photograph:
Synod Eucharist June 2024 St John's Coffs Harbour.*

Welcome to the third session of the 38th Synod of the Diocese of Grafton. We live, work and minister on this beautiful North Coast and Mid North Coast of NSW. God's own country! Bundjalung country. What a privilege to live, work and minister in such a place. So beautiful in fact that the Australian Bureau of Statistics tells us that if we live here, we just might live for a long time. A higher-than-average number of centenarians live in this region, in Port Macquarie in particular.¹

For a happy and fulfilled life, what else do we need, apart from beautiful country? A deeper question might be, **how can we flourish as humans?** As Christians, we would say we need the Lord Jesus Christ. After all, *by his great mercy [God] has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 1:3). That's the resurrection hope that we've been celebrating in Hope25. We cannot do without the help, love and mercy of God. We live our lives in God's service with love and compassion for one another. Putting the other first, as Jesus did. In him we live and flourish together.

Sadly, in the past twelve months or more we have seen this way of empathy, love and compassion challenged by key movements and leaders in our world. What used to be the domain of far-right extremists: hate, fear, fear of diversity, lack of integrity and character and a flagrant disregard for truth, have almost been normalised by this proud and self-satisfied narrative. Essential features of the way of Jesus - love, empathy, compassion and reconciliation are labelled as leftist, communist or woke. In this view, empathy apparently is a sin, and love is somehow limited and hierarchical. Those who buy into this narrative (including many so-called Christians) hold these beliefs so tightly that they refuse to acknowledge the humanity of the other. Such thinking not only goes against the scriptures, but a natural progression of it leads to the oppression of minority groups, ethnic cleansing, White Supremacy and Fascism. Last year I spoke about the genocide in Gaza. Since then, human-made mass starvation is being used as a weapon of war. As Christians we must continue our efforts to speak out against evil regimes and ideologies that wage war against humanity in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, Iran and other places.

As Christians we need to speak out against the **rising tide of nationalism** that uses hate and fear to pursue political ends. It's not only a threat to human dignity and flourishing, but an insult to God whose Son gave his life out of love for the world. Diversity is something that some now want to eradicate out of fear. Yet diversity reflects the intricate diversity of God's self in the Trinity, expressed in

the rich diversity of God's creation. Every human being bears within them the image of God, which confers upon each of us a dignity higher than any passport or immigration status. *Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their maker* (Proverbs 14: 31). Love and concern for the other, especially the weakest and most vulnerable among us, is not only central to Christianity but foundational to civil society as we know it, enabling all to live and flourish together. A host of scripture passages can easily be found to counter every argument of this oppressive, populist narrative. In summary though, God's love is no finite resource to ration out, but a river that flows wild and without restraint. The empire's vision of love is built on scarcity, but the Kingdom of God is built on abundance.²

Speaking out against this populist ideology attracts hateful responses. We hardly need to be reminded that Jesus and the early Christians lived in a country that was occupied by a foreign army - the Romans. So, if your Christianity wouldn't get you into trouble with Pontius Pilate it's probably just a chaplaincy for the empire and you are worshipping not God but some nationalistic ideology. In this context I'm happy to quote Pope Leo that *to be woke is not an insult but a calling*.

Therefore, the **Hope25** Campaign – Hope in an uncertain world - came at an opportune time. It has been heartwarming to explore and celebrate this theme of hope in a world that so much needs it. Hope25 was celebrated in many and various ways throughout the diocese and I am grateful that so many ministry units got on board. We'll hear more about this later in the Synod. It's my prayer that Hope25 has not just been another programme or campaign, but that it will have challenged us to be intentional about building **invitational Christian communities**, enhancing our skills and confidence to speak about the hope that is in us and not be shy about it. So, let's continue to tell stories of hope.

If we want to share hope, we are well placed to do it. Research from 2024 (The Australian Community Survey ACS by NCLS) shows that there are more Christian congregations in local communities than there are any other organisations. That is, there are more local congregations than there are schools, service stations or post offices, for example. These local congregations act as sources of social capital. People connected with these Christian congregations experience higher levels of social cohesion and are more likely to have a higher level of civic engagement than people who are not connected to church. People of faith have higher levels of wellbeing (not just on the North Coast!).³ So let's help people bond together, make bridges to others, and share hope in this uncertain

world. It's worth sharing that Revd Dr Sam Wells (St Martin-in-the-Fields, London) in his book [A Future that's Bigger than the Past](#) sees the potential of church communities to be centres of abundant life, reconciliation and hope, receiving, evidencing, dwelling in and sharing forms of social flourishing, and being a blessing to their neighbourhoods.⁴ Let's be that kind of community.

An important part of local communities on Bundjalung Country is of course our Indigenous Elders and Indigenous Communities. It has been a privilege and a joy to walk with them as we set out on the journey of reconciliation in developing our initial **Reconciliation Action Plan**. If you haven't read the plan you can find it [here](#).⁵ It was called for by this Synod three years ago and I'm sure that you are grateful, as indeed am I, to the RAP Working Group members, led by Dean Naomi Cooke, for getting us to this point. There is much more to be done as we work through the plan. In July 2024 I appointed The Rev'd Canon Aunty Lenore Parker as Honorary Canon of Grafton Cathedral in honour and recognition of her gentle but transformative ministry in building bridges of hope and trust between the Diocese and Indigenous communities.

A focus in recent years for myself as Bishop and for the Senior Clergy Team of the Diocese has been **wellbeing**. We have approached this in multiple ways. The [General Synod Wellbeing Policy](#) has given us a framework for the improvement of clergy wellbeing, based on research that indicates that best practice for ministry wellbeing incorporates a commitment to professional development, professional supervision, and ministry reviews.^{6,7} Research from Australia, the United Kingdom and North America has identified multiple factors that influence clergy wellbeing: being known, understood and valued; the challenges (as well as the benefits) implicit in church structures founded on personal relationship; the difficulties with managing boundaries of time, space, role and relationship; and both the isolation and the flexibility that can come from holding positions of responsibility in a loose line-management structure.⁸ On our part, we conducted a Leader Wellbeing Check in 2020 that showed that levels of anxiety, depression and stress were at concerning high levels compared to an earlier survey. Professional Supervision, Professional Development and Ministry Reviews each in their own way help to foster a greater sense of wellbeing. We also now have an EAP allowing Stipendiary clergy, Stipendiary Lay Ministers and other paid staff in the diocesan office and parishes, together with their families, to access (confidentially) a range of services (e.g. counselling) at no cost to them.

In 2023 this Synod called for the Bishop-in-Council to investigate the possibility of reducing the **clergy working week** from six days to five. This would be in line with what has happened in a number of other Australian dioceses, leading to improved clergy wellbeing. There will be a report about this later in this Synod with a recommendation. The Senior Clergy Team and I support any move that enhances the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of our clergy and their families. Please remember that one of the Key Principles of the Restructure was to *equip and enrich leadership for the present and the future* (p.16).

As many of you know I am a member of the Steering Group of the **Anglican Communion Health and Community Network**. This is an international network supporting the work of many Anglican hospitals, clinics and other health care agencies in 165 countries around the world. This took me to Hong Kong in October 2024. I've written about the meeting in [The Melbourne Anglican](#).⁹ It's a privilege to play a small part in promoting health and wellbeing on a broader scale. Indeed, it's humbling to hear how Anglican health services in developing countries with very limited resources (and sometimes in the face of active government opposition), are able to help people and communities to flourish. Sadly, the new administration in the United States has created a crisis in international aid that is directly affecting the funding of many health services. This is part of the mean-spirited populist movement that I referred to earlier. The major cuts to USAID are having a significant impact on the capacity to deliver services and get access to vital medication. There is a loss of staff and disruption to supply chains. As always, the most affected are the poor and vulnerable, including many Anglicans (the majority of whom live in vulnerability in regions affected by war and dislocation). In the end this will affect the health of everybody because it will lead to an increase in the spread of communicable diseases in low-income countries and hence a greater global vulnerability to disease outbreaks.

In case you haven't noticed I'm following a theme of **wellbeing** and I don't want to stray too far from my original questions: What leads to a happy and fulfilled life? What leads to human flourishing? Research (and of course common sense) tells us that adequate **housing** is a key ingredient. The **housing crisis** in our nation is very evident here on the North Coast. I thank **Anglicare North Coast** for their determination to make a real difference in this area. Their research tells us that the housing affordability crisis on the North Coast continues to deepen, with fewer properties available and even fewer that are affordable. The latest ANC research confirms that just 0.5% of rentals are now affordable for people on income support, only 8.5% of rentals are affordable for minimum wage earners

and that total rental listings dropped by over 20% since last year. The most affected include single JobSeeker recipients, young people on Youth Allowance, people with disabilities, single parents without work, and pensioners. Even full-time workers on the minimum wage face severely limited options, with single workers virtually priced out and dual-income families locked out of over 90% of all listings.¹⁰ While Anglicare North Coast is taking concrete action, with housing developments underway in Grafton, Goonellabah, and Kempsey, the latest research shows the scale of the crisis demands an even greater response. Catastrophic floods continue to put an enormous strain on the system. Parishes and individuals are encouraged to consider giving to ANC's [Affordable Housing Foundation](#), sharing ANC publications with their networks, contacting the local MP about housing affordability concerns and connecting vulnerable community members with ANC support services.

The increased population of the region has also resulted in an increase in enrolments at our **Diocesan Schools** of just over 25% over the past five years. It's great to see our schools flourishing. The Schools Commission continues to work on the development of two new schools in our region. One of the great strengths of our Diocese is our schools and I thank the Principals and Director, their staff and governing bodies, for the excellent education that is provided. I am grateful for the way that they are responding to the increased demands placed upon them due to the rapidly growing population in this region. They operate in an increasingly challenging funding environment for regional schools. It's wonderful to welcome groups of students from our schools to Grafton Cathedral as part of a regular program of visits.

I asked each of our Principals and the Director of our Preschool to identify the highlight of the past twelve months for them. I congratulate **Lindisfarne Anglican Grammar School** on being recognised in the National Education Awards as a finalist in the Best Professional Learning program and Best Student Wellbeing program, and as one of The Educator Magazine's 5-Star Employers of Choice, 5-Star Innovation School and a Sustainable School. **St Columba Anglican School** was successful in their application for candidacy for the International Baccalaureate Diploma course. This is a great achievement and gives them 18 months to get authorised to present the IB Diploma course for the first time to Year 11 in 2027. Across a typical week the **Lismore Parish Centre Preschool** engages with 68 families. This is an amazing task for a small facility, so well done. They have a huge impact on young lives, farewelling 32 children who transitioned to Primary School in 2024. **Emmanuel Anglican College** has employed an Aboriginal Education Support Officer, introduced Aboriginal

Scholarships (and awarded 5 such scholarships), conducted staff professional learning focused on learning about Bundjalung history and culture and connected with a number of the elders in their community to create real, respectful and genuine relationships. I also congratulate **Clarence Valley Anglican School** for being active in this space, being selected as one of three regional schools to take part in the Indigenous Veterans Commemoration Regional Youth Program which aims to deepen students' understanding of the service and sacrifice of Aboriginal Veterans. They travelled to Sydney for a commemoration service at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park last month. Finally, we celebrate the fact that **Bishop Druitt College** was named one of The Educator's 5-Star Innovative Schools for 2024, awarded for innovative initiatives such as their AISNSW Teaching School Hub.

In 2017 the Synod called for a **restructure** of the Diocese. As you know, [Restructuring for Mission and Ministry: Daring to Live into God's Future for Us](#) was adopted at Synod 2020. Since that time, it has been a major focus of our efforts. It was always understood that an **independent review of the restructure** would be needed at the five-year point. This review was conducted throughout 2024, with the Bishop-in-Council receiving the Review Report in December of 2024.

I would like to thank The Rev'd Sr Jan Crombie and the Rev'd Dr Stephen Lake for conducting the review. There were ten review gatherings across the diocese in Networks and Ministry Areas, as well as at Clergy Conference, Ministry School and Lay Ministry Conference. During the process, over 260 people from across the diocese attended the review gatherings and offered feedback. The main intention of the review process was to create listening space around experiences, noticing what was working well and what was causing concern.

I thank the people of each ministry unit for participating in the review in their Network or Ministry Area. The [Review Report](#) is available on the diocesan website.¹¹ The recommendations arising out of the review have been considered by the Bishop-in-Council. There were four recommendations:

- i. That a communication strategy be developed to ensure clear and regular communication about the ongoing work of restructuring in the diocese
- ii. That the discernment and formation processes for ordained ministry intentionally identify and foster gifts appropriate for leadership in mission
- iii. That Ministry Enablers be used to assist Ministry Areas and Networks to grow into the new models of ministry and mission

- iv. That a strategy be developed to equip Locum Clergy to be intentional about ministry and mission

The Bishop-in-Council will continue its oversight of these recommendations. In addition, I have written to Ministry Units in Networks and to Ministry Areas regarding the outcomes and recommendations of the Review, with specific priorities identified for each.

The **Review of Worship Centres** formed an important aspect of the restructure. Most centres identified for closure by the 2020 Synod have by now been closed and either sold or gifted to the community. Other centres were listed, not for closure, but for further review after three years. In the past 12 months or so the first round of these reviews was conducted by the Bishop-in-Council. The Bishop-in-Council has decided to continue to monitor those Worship Centres, with a further round of reviews in the coming years. In reviewing the Transitional Ministry Districts of the Orara Valley and Mid Richmond, the Bishop-in-Council noted that the option to create Ministry Districts was a major strength of the restructure plan. As we move from the *Restructuring for Mission and Ministry* document into a Strategic Plan for the Diocese in 2026, we need to continue to resource and enable creative ministries that the restructure encouraged. We also need to pick up on some other growth initiatives identified in the restructure plans, especially Church Planting (see page 22 of the restructure document).

When Christian communities flourish, they create disciples and people want to serve. It's been encouraging to see a healthy number of people exploring the call to lay and ordained ministry. At our Seekers' Day at the Cathedral in February, nine people attended who were exploring the call to be Deacon or Priest. We currently have ten students in our **Grafton Formation Program / Graduate Clergy Program**. I thank Archdeacon Tiffany Sparks and the Examining Chaplains and others for the work that they have put into this **Vocations Ministry**. As MDO Archdeacon Tiffany spends much of her time on this work as well as on the Formation Program, Graduate Clergy Program and Professional Development for lay ministers and clergy. Part of the General Synod's Wellbeing Policy is the provision of **Professional Development** opportunities for ministers. Because of the Grafton Clergy Conference and Ministry School we provide more than the minimum number of hours per year under the policy. This is part of our commitment to making sure people are well trained and resourced as God's partners in mission. The provision of this number of hours and of a high-quality program takes many hours of planning and preparation. I thank Archdeacon

Tiffany for her professionalism, creativity and dedication to help ministers use their gifts and flourish.

Finally, a few comments about the **Bishop's Registry**. A review of Registry operations in 2024 highlighted the important role that it plays in supporting Ministry Units, clergy and lay people by providing a host of services to the diocese. A number of parishes and schools were invited to give feedback as part of this review. The Bishop-in-Council continues to respond to the recommendations from the review, but a key outcome was the employment of two Executive Officers. Hence, at the beginning of 2025 we welcomed Noah Klane as Executive Officer (Compliance and Property) and Dr Susan Allan as Executive Officer (Schools and Governance). At that time our Diocesan Registrar and General Manager, Angela Mula, moved on to greener pastures. We all are grateful for her service to the Diocese as Schools Officer and later as Deputy Registrar and then Registrar. I'm also grateful to Leeanne Zamagias who served us well as Acting Registrar in the first part of 2025. At this Synod we welcome our new Registrar and General Manager Mr James Gale. An exciting appointment in the life of our diocese! Our prayers for our new staff as they take up these responsibilities. I am grateful to all the staff of the Registry because 2024 was a particularly challenging year. We were understaffed and it is a credit to the whole team that everyone went the extra mile, pulled together and got the job done. As always, I am also grateful to the Senior Clergy Team for their ongoing collegiality, advice and support.

Dr Murray Harvey
Bishop of Grafton

Footnotes and References.

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census Data.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/population-census/latest-release>
2. Kat Armas. *JD Vance is wrong: Jesus doesn't ask us to rank our love for others*. National Catholic Reporter. 1 February 2025. <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/guest-voices/jd-vance-wrong-jesus-doesnt-ask-us-rank-our-love-others>
3. The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Charles Sturt University. Engage. Issue 18, April 2025. https://cdn.csu.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/4450137/ACCC-Engage-Newsletter-Issue-18-WEB.pdf
4. Wells, S., (2019), A Future that's Bigger than the Past. Canterbury Press. (p.10).
5. Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan. Diocese of Grafton. https://www.graftondiocese.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Anglican-Diocese-RAP_web.pdf
6. Safe Ministry Commission, 2021. Ministry Wellbeing and Development.
www.graftondiocese.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Ministry-Wellbeing-and-Development-General-Synod-Policy-and-Guidelines.pdf
7. The General Synod Wellbeing Policy was also developed in response to the Royal Commission Recommendations that called upon the churches to develop, supervise and review their ministers.

8. For example: *Negotiating Wellbeing: Experiences of Ordinands and Clergy in the Church of England*, Living Ministry Panel Study Wave 1, 2018. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/Living%20Ministry%20Qualitative%20Panel%20Study%20Wave%201%20Report.pdf> and *Moving in Power: Transitions in Ordained Ministry*, Living Ministry Panel Study Wave 2, 2021. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Living%20Ministry%20Qualitative%20Panel%20Study%20Wave%202%20-%20Moving%20in%20Power.pdf>
9. Harvey, M.A., *The Anglican Network that is helping God's People Flourish*. The Melbourne Anglican, 3 December 2024 www.graftondioocese.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Article-in-the-Melbourne-Anglican-about-the-Anglican-Health-Network.pdf
10. Data sourced from the *Anglicare North Coast Rental Affordability Snapshot*, conducted March 15, 2025. Full report available on request and on the ANC website [2025 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot - North Coast, NSW - Anglicare North Coast](https://www.anglicare.org.au/2025-Anglicare-Rental-Affordability-Snapshot-North-Coast,NSW-Anglicare-North-Coast)
11. *Review Report: Preparing for Phase 2*. Rev'd Sr Jan Crombie and Rev'd Dr Stephen Lake. <https://www.graftondioocese.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/REVIEW-REPORT-Restructuring-3Dec24.pdf>



Photographs here and below

Above: Dedication of the Pizza Oven in Alstonville Parish as part of the CoVe Community on the Verge Garden partly funded by the Ministry Initiatives Trust set up as part of the Restructure.

Right: The Bishop touring health facilities in the Diocese of Hong Kong in his role on the Anglican Communion Health Network.

Below: Launch of the RAP; The Anglican Communion Health Network Steering Committee; The Primate attends the Bicentenary of St Thomas' Port Macquarie.





Photographs Above: St John's Liston celebrates the restoration of the church and Fr Alan Colyer's 50th Anniversary of Ordination; The Grafton Anglican Schools Commission; The Bishop speaks to student leaders from our Anglican Schools in the Cathedral.



Anglican Diocese of Grafton

Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan

February 2025 – February 2026



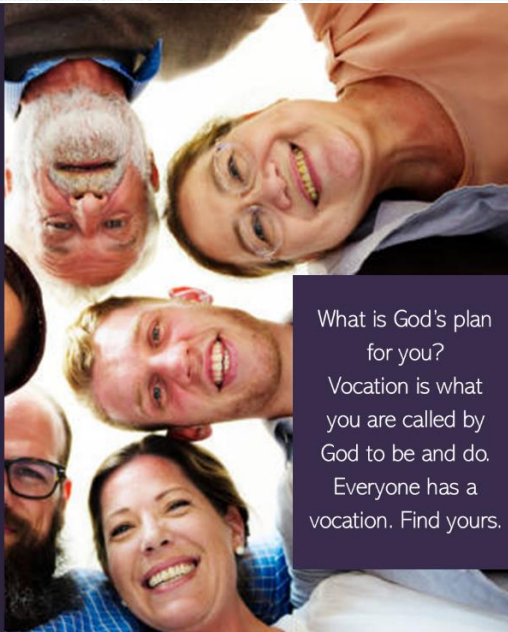
Vocations Week 2025

Seekers' Day 1 February

Vocations Sunday 2 February

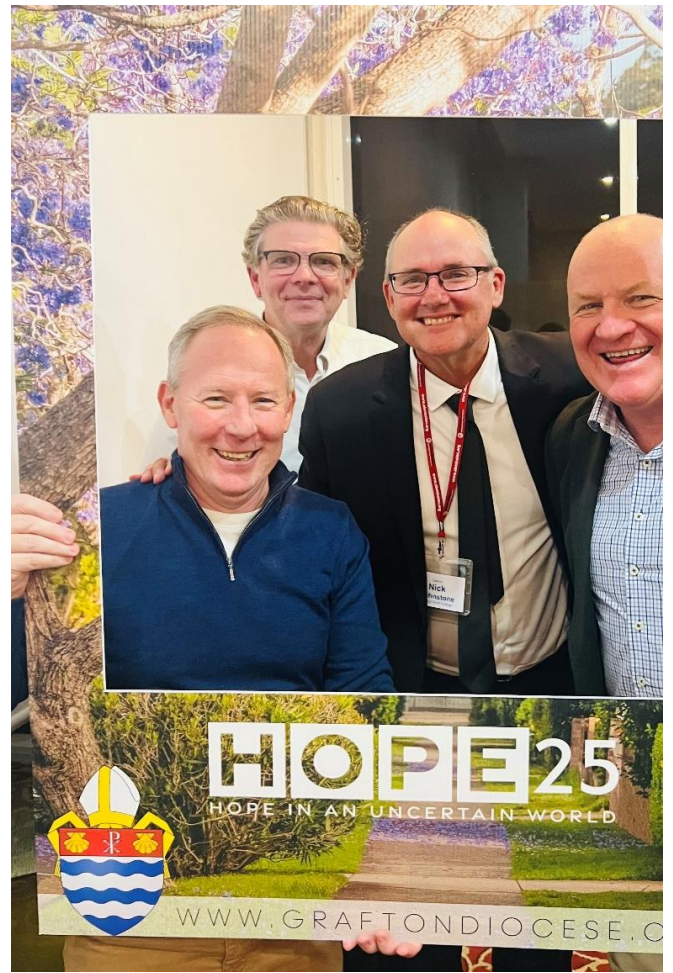
Vocations Reflections at
Clergy Conference
6-7 February

Talk to your Parish Priest or
Chaplain and check out our
resources to help
explore ministry options:
graftondiocese.org.au/call-to-ministry



What is God's plan
for you?
Vocation is what
you are called by
God to be and do.
Everyone has a
vocation. Find yours.





Photos on page 14: Creative ministry in the Parish of Byron; The Reconciliation Action Plan; Advertising our Seekers' Day; The Rev'd Canon Aunty Lenore Parker installed as a Canon; The Bishop Preaches at St James King Street, Sydney.

Photos on Page 15: Hope25 selfies.



The Anglican Diocese of Grafton
The Bishop's Registry,
50 Victoria Street, Grafton 2460.

www.graftondiocese.org.au